

CAN JEWS BE PATRIOTS?

By Hermann Adler (1839-1911)

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'Thought is powerful enough, without presumption and injustice, to triumph over presumption and injustice.' Zunz.

In the month of February last appeared an article by Professor Goldwin Smith, entitled 'England's Abandonment of the Protectorate of Turkey.' With the political portion of that article I do not propose to deal. I am one of those ministers of religion who, rightly or wrongly, think it preferable not to add to the strife of tongues which political questions are apt to evoke. But the writer has thought fit towards the end of his paper to level a most violent diatribe against Jews and Judaism, and to revive charges which, it was imagined, had for ever been relegated to the limbo of mediævalism. I feel myself bound, as one professing that ancient religious faith which has been attacked, not to allow those statements to pass unchallenged.

The time was when, on being reproached and reviled, we had no alternative but to muffle our faces in our gaberdines and meekly to hold our peace. Those times, it is to be hoped, have gone for ever. We need no longer speak

With bated breath and whispered humbleness.

The interests of truth, the sacred cause of civil and religious freedom, demand that we should repel with indignation charges against our faith and our race - charges which I cannot characterize otherwise than as cruel and gratuitous calumnies.

The gist of the indictment brought against us is that we are no patriots. They [the Jews] have now been everywhere made voters; to make them patriots while they remain genuine Jews is beyond the legislator's power.' I shall anon test the truth of this astounding proposition by the teachings of Judaism and the history of the Jews. But, before doing so, I shall examine the arguments whereby Mr. Goldwin Smith seeks to make his statement good. He says that the monotheism of the Jew, like that of Islam, is

unreal. The Jewish God, though single, is not the Father of all, but the Deity of His chosen race. One could almost imagine that he who could pen such words had never taken the Bible in his hand, for the very first pages of Holy Writ contradict the assertion. The Hebrew Scripture brings before us the Lord as Creator of heaven and earth. It tells us that all the families of the earth have one common origin, have sprung from one and the same stock. Not as a mere poetical fancy, but with the sober logic of fact, this venerable Document makes the whole world kin,' and teaches, in the genealogical table of nations written in the tenth chapter of Genesis, that the Semite, the Aryan and Turanian, Slav, Kelt, and Teuton are descended from one common ancestor. It is true we read in Exodus (xix. 5), Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.' And from this text it has often been erroneously represented that this selection by the Lord implied a partiality, as though He loved the descendants of Jacob only, whilst the fate of the rest of mankind was a matter of indifference to Him. The chosen people! How often has that expression been repeated with ill-disguised contempt, as though the assumption of this term were due to our self-satisfied righteousness, as though it were an outcome of pride and haughtiness, as though it breathed an exclusive spirit which caused us to regard ourselves as the sole objects of Divine care and providence! Accordingly Lessing, in his noble plea for universal tolerance, *Nathan the Wise*, puts these words into the mouth of the Templar, the representative of Christianity: -

But do you also know the people
That this human-mongering was first
Driven? Do you know, Nathan, which people
First called themselves the chosen people?
What? If I now, while not hating this people,
Yet despising them for their pride,
Could not escape their pride? Their pride
Which they inherited from Christians and Muslims.

Only their God is the true God!

But surely the words which immediately follow the above Biblical text would suffice to disprove the charge. For the whole earth is mine.' The words spoken by the Lord when He called Abraham, 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,'¹ equally proclaim the Divine concern in the welfare of the entire human family, and indicate the relation intended to subsist between the chosen race and the rest of the world. And in that same spirit of catholicity does Moses, the representative man of this exclusive race, address his 'tribal God' as 'the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh,'² the God alike of Jew and Gentile. All human beings form part of His universal family, all are alike created in His image, all are alike sustained, loved, and redeemed by Him, the eternal, merciful Father of the human race.³

Nor do the teachings of the prophets disprove the Professor's assertion less distinctly. Adonai,' in whose name the inspired seers speak, is not the tutelary Deity of the Israelites, is not the God of one people only, whose territory is bounded by the Lebanon and the Jordan. We hear their glowing admonitions addressed to all the great empires of the East - to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia no less than to the kingdom of Judea. Obadiah and Jonah, indeed, were sent exclusively to preach repentance to pagan Edom and pagan Nineveh. Nor do the interpreters of the Divine will announce their messages with cold insensibility. Their hearts overflow with pity while they declare Heaven's stern decree. My compassion yearneth for Moab as a harp,'⁴ Isaiah exclaims. Raise the lamentation over the king of Tyre, over Pharaoh,' are the words of Ezekiel.⁵ Nor are these kingdoms any the less objects of Divine mercy than is Israel himself. Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria, the work of mine hands, and Israel, mine inheritance.⁶

1 Gen. xii. 3.

2 Numb. xxvii. 16.

3 Cf. Pirke Aboth, ch. iii. §14. 'Man' (not the Israelite) is the object of divine love, inasmuch as he has been created in the image of the Lord.'

4 Chap. xvi. 11.

5 Chap. xxviii, 12, xxxii. 2.

6 Isaiah xix. 25.

Whilst the ancient classical poets taught that the golden age of the world was a thing of the past, the prophets of Israel announce that it must be looked for in future time. And what is the picture they unroll before us? Not Israel, the triumphant, enthroned in majesty on Zion as the conqueror of the earth, but all the nations of the globe beatified by the possession of truth and the acknowledgment of the Divine unity. For then will I turn to the nations a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent.'⁷ And Malachi, the last of the prophets acknowledged by Judaism, sums up these teachings in the touching words: 'Have we not all one Father, hath not one God created us?'⁸ - a quotation heard many a time and oft from Christian as well as Jewish pulpits. How can the learned Professor assert, in the face of it, that the Jews regarded God as the Deity of His chosen race, and not as the Father of all?

Mr. Goldwin Smith next states that the morality embodied in the Mosaic "Law was in its day a nearer approach to humanity than any other known law. But he adds the damaging qualification that both the morality and the law were distinctly tribal.' It 'sanctioned a difference of principle between the rule of dealing with a Hebrew and that of dealing with a stranger, which the civilized conscience now condemns.' A strange misconception! Amid the great divergence of opinions in the theological world, there is one point on which unanimity prevails - that the Decalogue taught on Sinai contains the germs of all the duties which man owes his Creator and his fellow-creatures. The Professor may look upon the opinion of a Jewish Rabbi as warped by partiality. Will he reject with like disdain the authoritative teaching of the Dean of Westminster?

The Ten Commandments delivered on Mount Sinai have become embedded in the heart of the religion which has succeeded.... They represent to us both in fact and in idea the granite foundation, the immovable mountain, on which the world is built up, without which all theories of religion are but as shifting and fleeting clouds; they give us the two homely fundamental laws, which all subsequent

⁷ Zephaniah iii, 9.

⁸ Mal. ii. 10.

religion has but confirmed and sanctioned - the law of our duty towards God and the law of our duty towards our neighbor.⁹

When Israel was about to be redeemed from Egypt, when the first precept was given him, the Divine order was issued, One law shall be to him that is homeborn and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.'¹⁰ Again in Leviticus,¹¹ where the penalty of the homicide is declared, the monition is added: Ye shall have one manner of law as well for the stranger as for one of your own country, for I am the Lord your God.' It was first commanded by the *Hebrew* Scriptures, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.'¹² There is no justification whatever for interpreting this command as applicable solely to the Israelite. The veriest tyro in the knowledge of Hebrew could prove satisfactorily by many a quotation that the word *reá* is also applied to a non-Israelite.¹³ Again and again we are told not to vex the stranger, but the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.'¹⁴ In his sublime prayer of dedication, Solomon implores the Lord: Moreover, concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh from a far-off country when he shall come and pray toward this house, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for.'¹⁵ What grand, all-embracing brotherhood do these words breathe!

I am aware that here and there in the Pentateuch some enactments may be found, which, at the first blush, would seem to bear out the Professor's assertion, and with these I shall now very briefly deal. The statement has been made that according to the Mosaic Law it was only forbidden to lend the Israelite at a usurious rate, but that no prohibition of this nature existed with respect to the non-Israelite. This opinion is sought to be

⁹ Dean Stanley's Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church, vol. i. p. 150.

¹⁰ Exod. xii, 49.

¹¹ xxiv, 22.

¹² Lev. xix, 18.

¹³ *Eg.* in the passage 'And they shall ask every one of his neighbor' (Ex. xi. 2). where the word *reá* applies to the Egyptians.

¹⁴ Lev. xix, 34.

¹⁵ 1 Kings viii. 41-43.

supported by a verse in Deuteronomy¹⁶ which is translated in the Authorized Version, 'Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury. The error is, that *neshech* is supposed to be synonymous with usury in the present acceptation of the term. The word, like usury in old English, simply means interest - any compensation whatever paid for the use of money. Accordingly the passage should be rendered - 'Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon interest, but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon interest.' With respect to the Israelite it was prohibited both to take and to give any interest whatever, for it was clearly the design of the Mosaic legislation to prevent the few growing rich at the expense of the many, and to maintain the simple primitive conditions of self-reliant, self-contained industrial support by agriculture and handicrafts, credit being regarded as an evil and a humiliation to the borrower. 'Thou shalt lend to many nations, but shalt not borrow,'¹⁷ is a blessing which sufficiently indicates the advantage of an internal commerce free from internal credit and indebtedness. Had the Israelites been allowed to lend to one another at interest, their lands would have been encumbered, and their energies as agriculturists would have been crippled. This happened in Athens and in Rome, where all the landed property gradually fell into the hands of the rich, and where the poor were so oppressed by the debts they owed the landowners that a social revolution ensued. The like condition of things even now exists in India. But this danger could not arise from lending to the foreigner. It was found necessary since the earliest times of the Hebrew commonwealth to carry on some commerce with neighboring countries, in order to exchange the surplus of their own produce for the commodities of other lands. Solomon sent to Hiram, King of Tyre, to purchase sandalwood and sycamore for the construction of the Temple. Thus, also, if an Israelite possessed any capital or produce which he could not utilize in his own country, he had a right to demand from a member of a foreign state some compensation for the use of the money or produce lent to him, and if the foreigner applied that capital to commercial enterprise no Mosaic principle was infringed by charging him interest. This

¹⁶ xxiii, 20.

¹⁷ Deut. xxviii, 12.

permission, however, only applied to sums borrowed for mercantile purposes. When the Gentile needed the loan of money, not for commerce, but for his subsistence, the Mosaic Law made no difference between him and the Hebrew. 'And if thy brother be waxen poor, and his hand faileth with thee, then thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he be a stranger and sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him or increase; but fear thy God.'¹⁸ Yes, this 'tribal' law, which we are told 'sanctioned a difference of principle between the rule of dealing with a Hebrew and that of dealing with a stranger,' did not allow the Jew to make any distinction between the Israelite and the Gentile in the exercise of philanthropy. He was bidden to visit the sick among the non-Israelites, to relieve their poor, and to bury their dead, even as those of his own people; for he was bound to walk in the ways of his Lord, who is good to all, whose tender mercies are over all His works.'¹⁹

The article proceeds: 'At length Humanity itself appeared.... The less noble part of the Jewish nation, led by national pride and ceremonialism, embodied in the Pharisee, rejected Humanity.' If Mr. Goldwin Smith desires to condemn us in these words for having refused to acknowledge the divinity of the teacher of Nazareth, we unhesitatingly plead guilty to the charge. We did refuse, and we still refuse, to pay divine adoration to a human being. We have been, and we are still, faithful to the teachings of Sinai: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before me.'²⁰ Nor can we bind our heaven-given reason in iron fetters, such as a belief in the mystery of the Trinity would throw around us. But humanity we have never rejected. We are not genuine Jews unless we be humane, merciful, brotherly, tender, and considerate. And does not the Professor himself admit: 'Benevolent and munificent they [the Jews] often are in the highest degree'?

Next the old prejudice is revived - for prejudices die hard - that during the middle ages the Jews were 'cruel usurers,' and learned to surpass all races in the art of handling money with profit, and in whatever is akin to that art. Unfortunately for humanity, the

¹⁸ Lev. xxv, 35-36.

¹⁹ Talmud. Gittin, p. 61; and Maimonides, *Kings*, ch. x. p. 12.

²⁰ Exod. xx. 3.

times have been when the Hebrew was shut out from every honest and honorable occupation, when money-lending constituted almost his sole means of obtaining a livelihood, and when the imposts heaped upon him, together with the unscrupulous conduct of his borrowers, compelled him to exact usurious rates of interest. I will not seek to exculpate the cruel usurers, but simply repeat what was said by a high-minded prelate, Gregory, Bishop of Blois (in his memoir in favor of the Israelites): 'O nations! If you recall the past faults of the Jews and their corruptions, let it be to deplore your own work.' Similarly, Martin Luther observes, in a pamphlet published in 1523: 'If we prohibit the Jews from following trades and other civil occupations, we compel them to become usurers.'

And how different is the estimate formed by another eminent contemporary historian of this martyr people, in whom Mr. G. Smith can see nothing, at the best, but agents and partners of royal and feudal extortion! Mr. Lecky, whose views were not blinded by party spirit, sees in them almost the only representatives of commercial activity, of learning and progress, during the middle ages.

While those around them were grovelling in the darkness of besotted ignorance; while juggling miracles and lying relics were themes on which almost all Europe was expatiating; while the intellect of Christendom, enthralled by countless persecutions, had sunk into a deadly torpor, in which all love of inquiry and all search for truth were abandoned, the Jews were still pursuing the path of knowledge, amassing learning, and stimulating progress, with the same unflinching constancy that they manifested in their faith. They were the most skillful physicians, the ablest financiers, and among the most profound philosophers. While they were only second to the moderns in the cultivation of natural science, they were also the chief interpreters to Western Europe of Arabian learning.²¹

There now remains the gravest charge of all to be dealt with, that genuine Jews

²¹ See Lecky, *Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, vol. ii. p. 281, and the authorities there quoted. Cf. Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, vol. i. ch. xviii., and vol. ii. ch. iv. A valuable monograph on this subject has recently been published by Prof. Schleiden entitled *The Importance of the Jews for the Preservation and Revival of Science in the Middle Ages*. The writer, neither a Jew nor of Jewish extraction, begins his treatise: 'The Jews are and remain the most remarkable people, and if one wants to enter into the symbolism of a providence, one may well call them the "chosen people of God."'

cannot be patriots. 'Their only country is their race, which is one with their religion.' '*Everything has already been there*,' says the Rabbi in Gutzkow's *Uriel Acosta*. It is not the first time that this cruel accusation has been preferred against us. We have heard it before from the lips of Haman, when he said 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.'²²

Granted that eighteen hundred years ago our ancestors dwelt amid the vine-clad hills of Judea, is that any reason why we should be less solicitous for the glory and interest of the empire we now inhabit? True, we still obey certain religious ordinances commanded by our Law; we still practice 'an oriental and primeval rite.' Can Mr. Goldwin Smith show in what manner it prevents us from being loyal citizens? With as much right he can assert that they who have substituted adult for infant baptism cannot be patriots. He surely cannot wish to set up the monstrous doctrine, that only they who belong to the Established Church can be imbued with love of their country. He surely cannot desire to push his proposition to its logical conclusion, and to brand Nonconformists and Roman Catholics as deficient, if not altogether lacking, in patriotism.

Or does the Professor mean to assert that the sacred Books, from which the Jewish religion is derived, fail to inculcate the virtue of patriotism? There are no grounds whatever for such a supposition. There was a time when Israel was carried away captive into Babylon, with its king, its priests and its prophets, its officers and artisans. Then there were some among the people -Jeremiah calls them dreamers and diviners - who were anxious to prevent the people from becoming too deeply attached to the country of their adoption, as they were not to abide there for more than seventy years. But the prophet sent them the missive, 'Serve the king of Babylon, and live.'²³ 'Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And seek the welfare of

²² Book of Esther iii. 8.

²³ Jeremiah xxvii, 17.

the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.'²⁴ And the counsel here given has ever since regulated our course of action. From the time of the Second Temple, where, as we are told by Philo and Josephus,²⁵ sacrifices were offered twice every day for Cæsar and for the Roman people, to this day, prayers ascend from every synagogue throughout the globe for the prosperity of the country in which the Jew may dwell, and for the welfare of his sovereign.

And we have proved by our actions that our prayers were not mere vain lip-service. Whenever and wherever the members of this 'exclusive race' were permitted to occupy responsible posts in the administration of their country, they devoted their energies loyally and zealously to discharge their functions for the welfare of the state and the ruler they served. We see them faithful to the traditions of their race; we see them treading in the footsteps of Joseph, who was called the 'Savior of the World' by the grateful Egyptian people. We see them following the example of Daniel and his colleagues, of Mordecai, Ezra, and Nehemiah, who served non-Jewish kings with willing allegiance. We read in history that some of the most faithful diplomatic envoys of Charlemagne were Jews.²⁶ Many of those men who by their writings have shed luster on Hebrew literature were wise statesmen, ministers for foreign affairs and ministers of finance, who brought prosperity and renown to the countries they served. Rabbi Chisdai ibn Shaprut was the trusted counselor of the Khalif Abdul-Rahman the Third. For nearly thirty years did Samuel ibn Nagrela conduct the diplomatic and military affairs of the kingdom of Granada. His biographer says of him that with equal devotion he served the state, science, his religion and his race-separate interests, each of which had its own claims upon him.²⁷ In addition to these could be named Don Isaac Abravanel, Don Joseph, Prince of Naxos, and a long list of illustrious statesmen. It could further be easily shown that devoted loyalty was evinced not merely by a few exceptional men

²⁴ Jeremiah xxix. 5, 7.

²⁵ *Wars of the Jews*, Book II. chap. x. § 4.

²⁶ The authorities for these and the following facts are given in Grätz's *History of the Jews*.

²⁷ See *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, 1st issue, 'The Minister Rabbi Samuel ibn Nagrela,' by Dr. Grütz.

who, it might be argued, rose superior to the prejudices of their race, but by the bulk of a Jewish population.

In the declaration to the Commonwealth of England by Manasseh Ben Israel, recently published in the *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature*, many an historical illustration is given of the steadfast faithfulness of the Jewish people as subjects. One example may suffice:-

In Spain, the Jews of Burgos, as the chronicles do declare, most generously showed the same fidelity in the time of Don Henry, who, having killed his brother the king, Don Pedro, made himself lord of all his kingdoms, and brought under his obedience all the grandees and people of Spain. Only the Jews of Burgos denied to obey him, and fortified themselves within the city, saying, that God would never have it that they should deny obedience to their natural lord, Don Pedro, or to his rightful successors a constancy that the prudent king, Don Henry, very much esteemed of, saying, that such vassals as those were, by kings and great men, worthy of much account, seeing they held greater respect to the fidelity they owed to their king, although conquered and dead, than to the present fortune of the conqueror. And a while after, receiving very honorable conditions, they gave themselves over.²⁸

It is but rarely that Jews have been permitted the opportunity of fighting for their country, but whenever they have been allowed to enter the lists, they have proved that the yellow badge of degradation and contumely had not altogether quenched the soul of manhood within them, that they were not unworthy descendants of the Maccabean heroes who cast off the yoke of the Syrian king. An imperial Austrian standard is to this day suspended in the *Old new school* at Prague, one of the oldest synagogues in Europe - a standard presented to the inhabitants of the *Jewish Town* by the Emperor Ferdinand the Third in recognition of the valor they had displayed in keeping at bay the Swedish besiegers in the year 1648.

During the present century until very recently Jews were not permitted to enter military service. Now that they have been admitted, have they proved themselves cowards or traitors on the day of battle? Patriots they cannot be,' says Professor Goldwin

²⁸ The truth of this fact is attested by a contemporary chronicler, Ayala, in his *Chronicle* for the year 1367, ch. 34, 35.

Smith. Is it just to cast this opprobrium upon the Jews of Germany who but lately shed their life's blood in defense of their Fatherland? Is this insult deserved by the brave Jews of France who rallied with equal alacrity under the banner of the Empire and the Republic when the safety of their country was imperiled? The Iron Cross and the badge of the Legion of Honor which decorate the breast of many a valiant Jew of Germany and France prove how confidently a state may reckon upon its Jewish sons in the hour of danger. Nay, even the poor downtrodden Jews of Romania volunteered in large numbers to serve in the national army, and fought patriotically at the side of their oppressors, in the war with Turkey just ended.

And in this dear England of ours have we Jews ever been guilty of an offense that could deserve the stigma of the Professor? Have the Jewish members of Parliament shown that they cannot really share the political life of a European nation? Have Jewish magistrates, has a Jewish Master of the Rolls, discharged judicial and magisterial functions less faithfully than their Christian fellow-citizens? When the cry of the famine-stricken indwellers of India reached our shores, did the members of this 'exclusive race' hold back their hand? When the Heir-Apparent was laid low by disease, did the Jews fail to send up their fervent prayers on high? Did not the Primate in that memorable thanksgiving service at the Metropolitan Cathedral state in his sermon, 'None were more hearty in their prayers than God's ancient people'?

I have been informed that of the 200,000 volunteers enrolled in England there are no fewer than 2,000 Jews. And this I can assert without fear of contradiction, that of all the subjects of our most gracious Majesty there is no section more deeply concerned for the honor, the highest and truest interests of our beloved country, no class more ready at the same time to make for its sake every sacrifice of comfort, of substance, aye, and of life, than that which professes the ancient, primeval faith of Judaism.

It is quite true that we Jews feel ourselves bound by the ties of religion with our brethren in foreign lands. It is quite true that when we hear that they are oppressed and persecuted we seek to do what is in our power to mitigate their sufferings. We invoke the

powerful help of the British Government that is ever ready to lift up its voice on behalf of persecuted humanity. But does this feeling of kinship militate against the loyalty we owe our country? Are those Christians less loyal citizens of England who have pleaded for the better government of their co-religionists in Bulgaria? Inasmuch as we are Englishmen, it behooves us to sympathize with the oppressed throughout the globe. We never prove ourselves better Englishmen than when we plead on behalf of humanity and justice, and in the name of civil and religious freedom.

I am aware that I have left one loophole to the Professor. He may say, 'Granted then that you are patriots, but then you are not genuine Jews.' Genuine Jews perhaps not, according to the distorted conceptions of an Eisenmenger, a Chiarini, or a Billroth. I, however, deny the right of an historian to first set up the travesty of a Jew and then to say, 'This is a Jew, and he who does not resemble him is not a genuine Jew.' And so, conscious of my own Judaism, I distinctly refuse the Professor the right to deny me the appellation of genuine Jew.

An old Talmudic adage has it that it is the function of the scholar to plant peace and goodwill upon earth. It should, in truth, be his mission to extirpate prejudice and to banish sectarian hatred. Is it not then to be deplored that a teacher of history should have lent the weight of his name to perpetuate prejudice and to galvanize into a spurious vitality the Hydra of religious intolerance?

A teacher of history should regard himself as an apostle of truth. If, pandering to popular prejudice, he substitutes sensational fiction for inexorable fact, though he may achieve distinction among the *ephemeride* of his time, posterity will refuse him the title of historian.